

# THE TEST

BY ROBERT ALEXANDER WASON

DR. McDONALD sat by the bedside, his fingers lightly touching his patient's pulse, his own face turned away from the pain-distorted face on the pillow, and his dark, magnetic eyes fixed dreamily upon the ceiling. The patient writhed with agony and moaned and muttered between set teeth; but the doctor's face remained perfectly calm and a little cold.

Presently he removed his fingers from the pulse of the patient—a large, florid, heavy-featured man—and quietly left the room. "The medicine will act very quickly, Miss Wilson. I wish you to report in twenty minutes, please," he said to the trained nurse who had followed him into the hall.

He walked to the library and crossed to the window, thrown wide to welcome the still diffident warmth. The green-shaded lights within the room threw a shadow on the window, and made no petty intrusion upon the glory of the night. It was one of those rare nights when the stars glitter with a radiant brilliance that seems to reach the very soul of man through the sense of sight, while the sky becomes a lofty dome lined with violet velvet.

The air was tingling with ozone and rich with the fragrance of early spring; not the perfume of flowers, but that more penetrating, primitive, personal odor of naked earth, heavy with the stirring of new life. Life—that was it, life! Earth and sky seemed filled to overflowing with the very essence of life, and Dr. McDonald caught some of it in his deep, full breaths. The clean air was more satisfying than the rarest perfume to his city nostrils, and as stimulating to his entire body as water to one lost in the desert. He continued to stand looking up at the stars, breathing rhythmically, and yearning for more of that life which Nature seemed to scatter with such prodigal carelessness.

IN spite of his white hair, thick as fine spun silk, in spite of pre-eminence in his profession, in spite of the command he had attained over his passions and emotions, Dr. McDonald was still a young man, an ambitious man, a man who had learned the value of time and strength, and knew that the world had need of him.

The world knew of him principally as the great heart specialist; he himself knew of one heart that still defied his skill, and this heart was his own. The first paroxysm had come ten years before; the second, five years later; and it was this second seizure that had determined the field of his labors. He had diagnosed his own case in a perfectly impersonal way; he had, in fact, taken somber pleasure in the assurance that of all the cases that had been brought to his notice, none was so beautiful a study, even as none was so hopeless of cure, as his own.

He knew every terrible phase of its acute attack, from the first cruel stab like the piercing of a lance, through the eternity of torture when the barbs of the lance seemed to be ruthlessly jerked back and forth, to that last, suffocating agony when he hung in uncaring suspense between this world and the next. Every emotion with its distinctive effect, every item of diet, every movement of the muscles, had been weighed in the grim scales of his science and their influence measured with mathematical accuracy. He had learned so to control his breathing that during a seizure there was no perceptible movement of the lungs as they took in the air in atom at a time, in order not to disturb the already bursting heart.

His entire energy was devoted to experimentation,—just the fractional minim of each drug, just the exact second at which to administer it. He had at last found a remedy that appeared to be the specific for which he had been seeking. He had tried it four times with perfect results; but had not yet had occasion to make a personal test. The man he had been called to see this evening was not a regular patient, and he had not been aware of his serious condition. He had a single treatment of the new medicine in a leather-covered vial in his vest pocket. He also had a presentiment that he himself would require it before he could return to his office.

In spite of his iron self control, there was that in the call which had excited him; and already he had found much comfort in the fact that all the results of his investigation had been carefully written in full, to be published after his theories had been proved either true

or false. He invariably felt a jealous pang when he thought that, should they prove false, another than himself would have the privilege of conducting the post mortem that he was sure would plant another small island in the great ocean of the unknown. There was not a morbid fiber in the man's character; he was a student, a pioneer, a crusader.

As he stood looking up at the stars, they slowly faded away, to be replaced by the rapidly changing scenes of his busy life. He saw himself as a barefooted boy on his father's farm, riding the colts, swimming, wrestling, running, fighting. He had been a real boy, and now that he looked again at the world through the eyes of a boy he was thankful that the vision had been made possible. Through his college days he had ignored the

out of her face as she raised it to his which gave Dr. McDonald a feeling of mingled pain and resentment. He had accepted her at the world's valuation; he now knew what the world had never guessed.

As he stood looking at the graceful outlines of neck and shoulders, he was seeing not the wife of this night, but the girl of ten years before. A small French clock on the mantel above the fireplace ticked monotonously, and, although the mechanism was a piece of art, the ticks sounded like the distant strokes of a heavy hammer upon a steel door. The clock struck ten, and they both started.

As the musical notes died away, she turned and looked into his eyes. It had been ten years since she had last looked into them. They had been full of pleading then; they were full of calm confidence now. They seemed to be taunting her. "Life seems to have dealt kindly with you, Donald," she said easily; but there was an undercurrent of reproach in her voice.

He smiled. "It has kept me busy, at work in which I could forget myself; and this is always a kindness."

"Yes, that would be a kindness," she murmured in a thoughtful tone, "and you have made the most of your opportunities. Sometimes it seems to me that I have never had a single opportunity."

"They are bashful to a degree and invariably come veiled," he rejoined, striving to avoid the serious; "but I had supposed that your life was full and complete. I do not do society, you know; but occasionally I skim its column in the paper, and from the frequent mention of your name I thought you must be achieving your highest ambition."

"Oh, I have played the game," she replied scornfully. "At first I refused to see what instinct and my senses told me; then I pretended to ignore what I could no longer pretend not to see. I buried my innocence and my hope in one grave—and played the game. I have hidden my real self all these years; for I could not accept the alms of pity, and my armor was proof against the missiles of scorn. I have welcomed to my own home with a smile women who were more to my husband than I was; and some of them thought I did not know, and some of them thought I did not care, and all were partly right. Of all the prizes that life offers a woman, I have won virtue alone. Virtue as a blossom of love is above price; but virtue for virtue's sake is like a ring that has lost its setting."

McDonald made no reply, except with his sympathetic eyes. He knew the peculiar impulsiveness of women under nervous stress, and he was seasoned by many a strange confession. Too long had he guarded his love for the woman before him to permit its escape now. He had emptied his cup to the dregs, and the draft had made him strong. He gloried in this strength which was higher and finer than mere physical strength, and there was nothing in his gaze save the kindness of understanding sympathy.

"You cannot know, you could not possibly know, what all this has meant to me," she continued after a moment. "Sometimes I have even hated you because you gave me up. You loved me then; and I—what could I know of love, ten years ago? I was young and strong and free; it seemed to me that I had the whole world to choose from; and you let me choose—what I did."

"I had nothing but prospects to offer then, Marian; and I knew but little more of life or love than yourself. I offered all I had. I was sorry I had no more to offer; but, really, we were very young ten years ago, and youth is both proud and modest. I could only offer,—to urge was quite beyond me then,—but I assure you that your refusal nearly cost me my life."

The distinguished appearance of Dr. McDonald—the white hair, the beautiful complexion, the dark, glowing eyes, which gave him prominence in any assemblage, held an irresistible charm for the woman who looked into his eyes with a wistful reproach, as she contrasted his life with her own, himself with her husband. "Why have you never married?" she asked.

"I suppose my temperament is the true answer," he replied, smiling, "and then I have found a most exacting and a most satisfying mistress in my profession. I confess a peculiar feeling for the girl you used to be; but for the most part woman has become a creature



Thankful that She Was Not Watching Him, He Hurried Away.

intention of Nature, and had forced himself to be an athlete, spurring his heart at times as a jockey lifts the discouraged horse over the last cruel steps at the finish; but even now, when those wonderful moments of youthful triumph returned with youthful freshness to his mature understanding, they brought no tinge of regret. He had purchased a full measure of life; he was willing to pay the price in pain and self denial, even though he rebelled at the thought of resigning a career so replete with usefulness.

HE had been standing at the window not more than ten minutes before Mrs. Windle, the wife of his patient, entered, and crossing the room silently touched him on the arm. He turned with a questioning expression on his disciplined face; but at sight of her it changed to a smile of greeting. She had sent for him from a distant suburb upon learning of the seriousness of her husband's attack, had just returned, been warned by the nurse not to enter the sickroom, and now as they shook hands she said, "Tell me the truth. Will he recover?"

"He will recover," answered the doctor simply.

He had turned from the window, and now she walked past him and looked up into the night. It was frequently said that even Father Time bowed to the sway of Mrs. Windle. There were no gray hairs, there were no wrinkles; but something there was that had looked